

“The Prayerful Christian”

November 11, 2012

Text: James 5:13-16

**It should be the ongoing norm for believers to talk over their
life-experiences w/ the Lord in prayer.**

In writing to the Thessalonian Xns, Paul said it like this=>

*“Rejoice always; / **pray without ceasing**; / in everything
give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus”*
(I Thes 5:16-18).

God wants us to converse w/ Him every day, just as Adam/Eve
did in the Garden of Eden.

- * When we are facing a difficult test in school or at work,
He wants us to talk w/ Him about it.
- * When we're going to have to meet w/ a difficult person,
and we need to say something he won't want to hear,
God wants us to talk w/ Him about it, first.
- * When we feel elated because some unexpected blessing
has come our way, we are to thank Him for it.
- * When we read in Rom 1, that *“the wrath of God is
revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and
unrighteousness of men”* (Rom 1:18) and we are
grieved over the ungodliness/unrighteousness of men
in our own country, we should bow our heads and
pray to the Lord for our nation.
- * When feeling weary/defeated/discouraged because of
sickness or affliction, a prayerful Xn goes to his
Savior in prayer, and pours out his heart.

Worldly Xns are not so inclined.

In fact, their response is to do anything/everything but pray.

When there's absolutely nothing they can do to change the circumstances themselves, they'll lay awake at night, worrying about them, but they won't pray over them.

And that's a shame.

As Joseph Scriven wrote in his familiar hymn=>

What a friend we have in Jesus	Have we trials and temptation?
All our sins and griefs to bear!	Is there trouble anywhere?
What a privilege to carry	We should never be discouraged
Everything to God in prayer!	Take it to the Lord in prayer.

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

In today's text, James portrays prayer in 3 different ways=>

- * As a Believer's Response to Various Emotions
- * As a Believer's Response to Special Needs
- * As an Ongoing Practice Among Believers (gathered together as a church).

*** Prayer as a Believer's Response to Various Emotions**

[James 5:13]=> *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.
Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises."*

James starts out w/ the words, "*Is anyone... suffering?*"

The word "*anyone*" makes this a very individual/private matter.

- * No one can be a stand-in for you when you're suffering;
- * No one can decide how you're going to handle it.

- * No circumstance makes it inevitable that you respond to it in any particular way—you must make the choice, whether/not to take it to the Lord in prayer.

The issue is ultimately between you and God, alone.

“*Suffering*” (*kakopatheo*) combines 2 words—bad/suffering.

It involves suffering from something bad, such as trouble/distress/sickness; but suffering bravely.

- * In 2 Tim 2:9, Paul is seen suffering the hardship of imprisonment for preaching the gospel.

- * In 2 Tim 4:5, Timothy is told to bravely suffer discouragement w/i his ministry.

- * In Jms 5:10, we read that the OT prophets patiently suffered persecution.

In our text, James addresses any Xn who is suffering badly but bravely.

He writes to Jewish Xns, driven out of Jerusalem by fierce persecution, and still suffering hardships from the pagans around them.

- * They may have been among the poor in 2:15 who were w/o food/proper-clothing.

- * They may have been those in 4:11 being slandered & judged by the wagging tongues of worldly Xns.

- * They may have been the poor laborers in 5:4 being cheated out of their rightful wages by the rich.

- * Or they may have suffered from some sickness/affliction.

Whatever the cause of their suffering, James says the solution is for them to pray about it.

And to keep on praying, for God to either relieve their burden, or give them grace/strength to keep bearing and enduring it patiently.

I Pet 5 tells us to cast all our anxiety on the Lord (5:7), & that's exactly what James is telling them to do as well.

The greatest anxiety any man/woman/child could ever suffer is the anxiety of not knowing for sure that things are right between him/God.

I pray for anyone here who hasn't asked Jesus to forgive his sin and save his soul, that the H.S. will intensify that anxiety until they cast themselves on God's mercy and seek His gracious-gift of life.

Now James switches from the emotion of suffering, to its opposite=> cheerfulness (at the other end of the emotional spectrum).

He's not talking about the boisterous hilarity of this world. "*Cheerful*" refers to a spirit of calm/cheerful optimism.

Cheerfulness was the attitude manifested by Paul in Acts 27:25, when his ship was sinking, and everyone else onboard was panicking (including the crew of sailors).

The “cheerful” believers James has in mind are at the top of their game spiritually, feeling confident/optimistic because of their faith in X.

He tells them to sing praises, to God in their cheerfulness.

Being filled w/ the Spirit they are to keep=> “*making melody with [their] heart[s] to the Lord*” (Eph 5:19).

When believers are prospering, we are to praise God w/ a humble gratitude that revels in the Lord’s blessings.

We aren’t to lapse into worldly self-indulgence, self-confidence, and self-congratuation.

And when things go badly for us, we can still maintain a cheerful attitude, praising the Lord w/ psalms/hymns of praise, just as Paul/Silas did, while sitting in a Philippian jail.

Acts 16 says they=> “*were praying and singing hymns of praise to God*” (16:25).

They were surprisingly cheerful!

Xns can wholeheartedly praise God in prayer, because of pleasant circumstances, or simply because they are trusting the Lord in spite of unpleasant circumstances.

They have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb of God, forgiven their sin, & made alive in X.

They have been adopted by God as their Father, given eternal life, & given an eternal inheritance that is awaiting them in heaven.

So our constant conversation w/ the Lord should certainly include praises for all His goodness to us, both when we're suffering and when we feel cheerful.

*** Prayer as a Believer's Response to Special Needs**

This is the 2nd way James portrays prayer in our text, & again it is seen as the ongoing lifestyle, of a prayerful Xn.

[Verse 14]=> *"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;"*

This verse is viewed very differently by various religious groups.

* Our Catholic friends claim it supports their sacrament of extreme unction (also known as "last rites").

But according to Catholic doctrine, that "sacrament" is supposed to prepare people for death.

The anointing James writes about accompanies a prayer, that restores them to health/life.

* Our name-it-claim-it friends say this verse is a guarantee of health/healing to all Xns whenever they pray for it.

But what if it's not God's will to heal? Doesn't that matter?

* It wasn't God's will for the Apostle Paul (who actually had the gift of healing) to heal Epaphroditus.

Phil 2:27 says this faithful servant of God was still critically ill when Paul left him.

* 2 Tim 4:20 says he left Trophimus sick at Miletus.

Didn't Paul know about this verse in James?

We believe God can/does heal people, but verse 14 doesn't guarantee endless life/health in these unresurrected bodies.

To make sense of this verse we need to carefully examine the words themselves in the verse.

“*Sick*” essentially means w/o strength—either physical/spiritual strength (i.e., it refers to weakness).

It refers to physical illness/weakness 18 times in NT, and to emotional/spiritual weakness 14 times.

An example of the latter would be Rom 14:1=>

“*Now accept the one who is **weak in faith***” [from the same root word, *asthenei*, translated “*sick*” in vs 14.

I believe the sickness/weakness James is referring to can certainly be physical, but it's also spiritual.

In the Jewish mind, the two were interlinked/overlapping aspects of man's general wellbeing.

When a person has been physically ill for a long time, he can get so discouraged, that it affects him spiritually.

Many of us know Xns to whom that has happened.

In verse 15, James connects healing from sickness, with the confession of sin, which certainly involves spiritual issues.

“Healing” in NT usually speaks of physical healing, but occasionally includes spiritual healing as well.

So the “*sick*” folks James mentions are weak/weary,
discouraged/defeated Xns, who have bravely suffered from
illness or some other hardship, but have gotten worn down.
They no longer have the strength w/i themselves to fight
the good fight, or even to pray effectively for
themselves, & they need the support of strong fellow
Xns.

They are like weary/wounded soldiers in the war between
the Kingdom of God, and Satan’s kingdom.

In many cases, they may have been under the pressure of
affliction/illness/persecution so long, they’ve actually
developed sinful attitudes, and their faith is very
weak.

**The remedy James prescribes for this sickness/weakness is to
call for the elders to pray over the person.**

Why? Does spiritual healing-power come w/ the office of elder?

No, but hopefully the elders in any church are among the
stronger/more-mature believers there, & that maturity
should be reflected in their prayer-life.

A spiritually exhausted sheep, mentioned by James has
called for his shepherds to come/help him.

He knows that prayer is one of an elder’s primary duties,
just as it was for the Apostles, who said=>

*“We will devote ourselves to **prayer**, and to the
ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).*

The OT prophet Samuel told his people=> *“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way”* (I Sam 12:22).

Prayer & instruction in the Word have always been, and always will be, the primary responsibilities of true spiritual leaders. Sadly, today, Xns w/ problems are often referred to a “professional counselor,” to give them human advice and worldly wisdom.

What they really need is the wisdom of God’s Word, and the power of prayer from mature/loving shepherds, or some other godly Xn.

Notice that the elders are not told to initiate this prayer-session with the weak person.

That is the responsibility of weakened person himself.

Now we come to an important/hotly-debated question=> Why does James tell the elders to anoint this man w/ oil?

Does God have some special/peculiar fondness for olive oil?

* Some say oil was considered medicinal.

But oil has little healing/medicinal value.

* Some teach that it symbolizes the H.S.’s healing power/presence.

But there’s nothing in Scripture to really support that.

That’s not even its meaning in I Sam 16:13, where David is anointed and the H.S. comes mightily upon him.

There the purpose of the anointing w/ oil is to
consecrate David as king, just as Aaron was
anointed when he was consecrated as H.P.

* Jesus never anointed anyone w/ oil while healing them.

* Neither did the Apostles, when they healed people after
the Church was established, and they had become its
leaders.

**The meaning of anointing w/ oil is found in Scripture, where
olive oil is associated w/ gladness/joy.

* E.g. in Isa 61:3, Messiah speaks prophetically, saying that
when He comes to earth, He will bring with Him=>
*“the **oil of gladness** instead of mourning.”*

Heb 1:9 uses the same phrase, quoting Isa 61:3.

* Psa 45:7 also speaks of Messiah prophetically, saying=>
*“Thy God, has **anointed** Thee With the **oil of joy**.”*

So anointing w/ oil is associated in the Bible with
joy/gladness.

*But oil is also spoken of in Scripture as soothing to the body.

That's why the Good Samaritan, who rescued the injured
Jewish man=> *“came to him, and bandaged up his
wounds, pouring **oil** and wine on them”* (Lk 10:34).

The wine was antiseptic; the oil soothed the pain
in his wounds.

In Isa 1, the nation of Israel is pictured as a spiritually injured man, having spiritual wounds left unattended by their negligent leaders=> *“bruises, welts, and raw wounds, Not pressed out or bandaged, Nor softened with oil”* [i.e., soothed w/ oil] (Isa 1:6).

****Taken together, oil’s connection w/ gladness & its soothing effects on the body, become a picture of wellbeing.**

That is how it was viewed in Israel.

Psa 104 lists many blessings of God’s providence on earth.

Man’s wellbeing is one of them, as the Lord provides an individual w/ => *“wine which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make his **face glisten** with **oil**, And food which sustains man's heart”* (104:15).

When wine makes the man glad, he puts oil on his face to make it glisten.

Anointing w/ oil made a person look/feel healthy/happy.

On the other hand, Deut 28 lists the curses which would befall God’s people, if they ever persisted in disobeying Him.

1 of those curses would be an end to anointing themselves w/ olive oil.

Deut 28:40=> *“You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you shall not **anoint** yourself with the **oil**, for your olives shall drop off.”*

When God sent a nation to invade & capture Israel, there would be no one left to harvest the olives and press out their oil.

Anointing oneself w/ oil was part of a daily routine that gave Jews a great sense of personal health/wellbeing.

A man got up each day, washed, & then anointed himself w/ olive oil.

Failure to do so indicated that something was wrong.

* E.g. in 2 Sam 14:2, Joab asked a woman of Tekoa not to anoint herself, so King David would think she was in mourning.

Having no olive oil on her face, she looked like a mourner.

* In Mt 6, Jesus told His followers not to make it obvious when they were fasting, as the scribes/Pharisees did, so people would admire them.

He said=> “*When you fast, **anoint your head**, and wash your face / so that you may not be seen fasting by men*” (6:17-18).

I.e., go through your normal, daily hygienic routine of washing/anointing your face.

Not only did the Jews anoint themselves, they also anointed one another’s heads, as an act of affection/courtesy.

Failure to do so was sometimes considered rude.

That’s why, when Jesus visited the home of Simon the

Pharisee, He said=> “*You did **not anoint My head** [as expected] **with oil**, but she [a “woman of the city”] **anointed My feet with perfume**” (Lk 7:46).*

This is the sense of anointing w/ oil that we see in our own text.

Some beleaguered Xn is so discouraged because of illness or some other hardship he has endured, that he's no longer even taking care of himself, by a daily anointing w/ oil. In loving concern for their fellow Xn, the elders go to his house, and touch his face, to anoint him w/ oil. The warmth of this human contact couldn't help but lift his spirits, as this soothing symbol of joy/wellbeing was lovingly applied. Better yet, the elders were anointing this person "*in the name of the Lord,*" acting on the Lord's behalf, doing what He would do, if He were still physically on earth. The love he felt in the warm touch of their hands, was the love God Himself had poured out w/i their hearts. Should we still anoint people w/ oil today, when it no longer conveys the same cultural meaning? When asked to do so , I do anoint the sick/weak, just as a way of making warm/personal contact with them. In the same way, I will lay my hands on their back or shoulder as I pray for them, in order to identify with them in their weakness/sorrow/pain. But the anointing was/is just a precursor to the elders' prayer for this Xn, whose life had become so intertwined w/ their own.

The language James uses makes the anointing a secondary/ancillary event, the main event being the prayer itself.

And they didn't pray for him as officials of the church, there to do a duty, but as fellow Xns caring for a loved-one.

This was a touching picture of very human compassion.

When the elders in such a situation pray, their prayers are not distant/dispassionate, but full of loving fervor and tender-concern, being so involved w/ the person and his needs.

[Verse 15]=> *“and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”*

Whose “faith” is James talking about? The elders.

But this is very unequivocal language=> *“The prayer offered in faith **will** restore the one who is sick”* (no if/and/buts).

But what if it's not God's will that the person be restored, as it wasn't in Job's case, or in Paul's case when he prayed for Epaphroditus/Trophimus, & for his own thorn in the flesh?

If the elders pray with this kind of effectual faith (that actually leads to healing), it's because God has given them that faith, so it is indeed His will that the person be healed in such a case.

And if it's not God's will, at least the person has received a wonderful/encouraging demonstration of Xn love.

Notice that James adds=> *“If he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”*

I Jn 1 says=> *“If we **confess** our **sins** He is faithful & righteous to forgive us our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1:9).

So this weak Xn must have confessed his sins to X,
otherwise the elders could not have been able to pray
the “prayer of faith”—his own unconfessed sin would
block his own healing.

Prov 28=> *“He who **conceals** his transgressions will not prosper, But he who **confesses** and forsakes them will find compassion”* (28:13).

And as we’ll see in the next verse, this believer in verse 15
has also confessed his sins to the elders.

Now you can sense the intensity/closeness of this encounter, as a
sheep makes himself very transparent/vulnerable before his
shepherds, by his confession.

God heals this scarred/weary believer w/i that
loving/nurturing relationship of a Xn & his elders.

It’s a wonderful thing.

Grammatically, *“If he has committed sins”* is a 3rd class condition,
which means it’s both possible/probable that he has sinned,
but not inevitable.

It doesn’t guarantee he has, nor does this mean that every
Xn’s illness represents God’s disciplining him for his
sin.

We have no right to tell an ill believer, “I know why you’re sick. It’s because you’ve sinned, and God is chastening you.”

That’s exactly what Job’s counselors kept telling him, and God became so angry at their arrogant presumption, that, if Job hadn’t prayed for them, they would have died.

3 Jn 2 speaks of a man named Gaius, & tells us he was spiritually strong/healthy, even though he was physically weak.

But when a believer does sin, the guilt of his sin can take a devastating toll on his health, as it did in David’s case.

Psa 38=> “ *There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. / My wounds grow foul and fester. Because of my folly, / I am bent over & greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. / For my loins are filled with burning; & there is no soundness in my flesh* ” (3, 5-7).

In David’s case, he was sick because of his sin.

The same is true in I Cor 11:29=> “*He who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. / For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep* ” (29-30).

What could be better therapy for a person like this than to confess his sins & know that God has forgiven them? That’s exactly what David does in Psa 51.

There is one important clause in vs 15 we dare not overlook:

“The Lord will raise him up.”

It's not the elders who raise him up, even though it's their prayer.

It's not even the faith God gives them, to pray that prayer with effectual power, that raises him up.

The Lord Himself raises him, in response to the elders' "prayer of faith."

He alone gets all the glory.

*** Prayer as an Ongoing Practice Among Believers**

[Verse 16]=> *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.”*

***“Therefore”* connects this verse w/ the previous verses.**

So the *“one another”* who are confessing their sins and praying for one another, are first/foremost the sick man and the elders.

The context of these verses makes that conclusion logical/obvious.

This means the elders cannot approach this man proudly, as if they were sinless themselves, but humbly, as fellow Xns who may have sins of their own to confess, just like the sick man.

Psa 66=> *“If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear”* (66:18).

If there is sin in the elders' hearts, God won't hear their prayers, or heal the sick man in response to those prayers.

I.e., their sin can disqualify their prayer and block his
being healed.

The word “*pray*” is not the same word for prayer used in vss 13
& 14.

It is the expression of a fervent wish/desire for something.
With their own sins confessed, having listened to the sick
man’s confession, & having made personal/loving
contact w/ him, by anointing him w/ oil, they can/do
pray w/ fervent/earnest longing, for him to be healed.

Harry Ironsides told a story about a Catholic priest who insisted
that a parishioner confess to himself or to one of the priests
in his order.

To which the man replied=> “I will confess my sins to you
if you will confess your sins to me.”

Elders must be ready to answer, “I’ll agree to that.”

**But 2nd, the language expands this verse to also include the
congregation as a whole.**

“*Confess*”/“*pray*” are ongoing verbs—keep on
confessing/praying.

That can’t happen w/i the time limits of this one prayer-
session, between the sick man and the elders.

It must refer to habitual patterns w/i the congregation.

I.e., what the elders do in an encounter like this, is to be the
example and the model for confession/prayer w/i the
whole church.

I Pet 2:9 says of all Xns, that we are a “*royal priesthood*.”

So the pattern we find in this text, is to become an ongoing part of the fellowship, & the relationships, between all the believers, in a church.

Rom 15:14 says that all Xns who are filled with goodness and w/ biblical knowledge are able to admonish other Xns, and thus to hear their confessions.

Someone: “If that means I must confess my sin to another Xn, I’m going to be picky about whom I open up to, like that!”

And well you should.

When you choose a fellow believer as your confessor, make sure he is good, knowledgeable of Scripture and trustworthy, & will deal w/ any/all confidences you may share as if in God’s very presence.

Choose a mature/humble/prayerful Xn, whose heart you trust, as someone whose prayers God will listen to, and answer.

Then enjoy the spiritual wellbeing of sensing God’s love in a fellowship of prayer between you, another Xn, & the Lord, and in the process, discover for yourself what a good friend we have in Jesus.

“The Prayerful Christian”

November 11, 2012

Text: James 5:13-16

1. It should be the ongoing norm for believers to talk over their life-experiences with the [10 Lord] in prayer.

I Thes 5:16-18; Rom 1:18

In today’s text, James portrays prayer in three ways...

*** Prayer as a Believer’s Response to Various Emotions**

[James 5:13]

2. “*Suffering*” involves suffering from something bad, such as trouble, [18 distress], or sickness, but suffering bravely.

II Tim 2:9; 4:5; Jms 5:10; 2:15; 4:11; 5:4

3. Whatever the cause of suffering, James says the solution is to [10 pray] about it.

I Pet 5:7; Acts 27:25; Eph 5:19

4. When believers are prospering, we are to praise God with a humble gratitude that revels in the [14 Lord’s] blessings.

Acts 16:25

*** Prayer as a Believer’s Response to Special Needs**

[Verse 14]

Phil 2:27; 2 Tim 4:20

5. “*Sick*” essentially means without either physical or [20 spiritual] strength.

Rom 14:1

6. The remedy James prescribes for this weakness is to call for the [14 elders] to pray over the person.

Acts 6:4; I Sam 12:22

7. In Scripture olive oil is associated with gladness and [8 joy].

Isa 61:3; Heb 1:9; Psa 45:7; Lk 10:34; Isa 1:6

8. Oil’s connection with gladness and its soothing effects on the body become a picture of [20 wellbeing].

Psa 104:15; Deut 28:40; II Sam 14:2; Mt 6:17-18; Lk 7:46

9. In our text some beleaguered Christian is so discouraged because of illness or some other hardship that he's no longer even taking care of himself by a daily [20 anointing].

[Verse 15]

10. If the elders pray with this kind of effectual faith, it's because God has given them that faith; so it is His will that the person be [14 healed].

I Jn 1:9; Prov 28:13

11. When a believer sins, the guilt of his sin can take a devastating toll on his [14 health].

Psa 38:3, 5-7

*** Prayer as an Ongoing Practice Among Believers**

[Verse 16]

12. The elders cannot approach this man as if they were sinless themselves, but humbly, as fellow Christians who may have sins of their [8 own] to confess.

Psa 66:18

13. What the elders do in an encounter like this is to be the model for confession and prayer within the [12 whole] church.

I Pet 2:9

14. Enjoy the spiritual wellbeing of sensing God's love in a fellowship of prayer between you, another Christian, and the [10 Lord].

That's not even the point of David's anointing as king (I Sam 16:13) when the H.S. came mightily upon him